

The Welsh Bard *Athenydd* and His Wife, Frances Davies, of South Fillmore Avenue, Scranton

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My father's maternal grandparents were James W. Reese (*Athenydd*) and Frances Davies of 141 South Fillmore Avenue, Scranton. They were among the leading citizens of the Welsh community in Scranton during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

James W. Reese, the son of a Welsh minister, was born in Aberdare, South Wales, and came to America in 1870, making his home in West Scranton. At 6 o'clock in the morning on May 9, 1874, he married Miss Frances Davies, daughter of Daniel J. and Mary Davies of South Fillmore Avenue. The ceremony was performed by the Rev. D. Dyfri Davies, of Kingston, PA, at the Davies homestead on South Fillmore Avenue.

The following children were born to them: Daniel J. Reese, Mary Reese (Mrs. L. A. Weber), Olwen Reese (Mrs. William Ruch), Fanny Olivia Reese (Mrs. Silas Powell), and Walter Reese.

James W. Reese--miner, churchman, and writer--worked for the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Company and later with the Pennsylvania Coal Company at Underwood (a company town near Olyphant/Throop, PA)--and was a staunch advocate of unionism. He served as treasurer of Local No. 1428 of the United Mine Workers and was sent as a representative to many district conventions. For 12 years he served on the state miners' examining board and for 15 years on the state mine foreman examining board.

James W. Reese was a thorough church believer and a constant and faithful attendant. Beginning at the age of 12, he was affiliated with church congregations. He and his wife Frances were among the organizers and charter members of the Tabernacle Congregational church, of which Mr. Reese was the initial recording secretary. Well known throughout the Lackawanna Valley among the churches of that denomination, James Reese was elected a moderator of the Welsh churches of northeastern Pennsylvania.

He was the first layman to be elected, in 1887, as secretary of the Gymanfa, an association of the Congregational churches in northeastern Pennsylvania. He attended personally to the supply of Welsh Congregational pulpits for the

commonwealth of Pennsylvania with visiting ministers from Wales. When Miss Rosina Davies, the noted Welsh evangelist arrived in America from Wales, he personally arranged a schedule for her in her journey throughout the principal Welsh settlements in America.

James Reese was also deeply interested in fraternal welfare and helped in the organization of the Electric City Commandery, No. 177, of the Knights of Malta, and remained a member to his death.

James Reese also devoted a large part of his time to social activities and played a prominent role in the staging of eisteddfods in northeastern Pennsylvania. He was a promoter of the great eisteddfod of the middle 1870s, which was presided over by Governor Hartranft, and which brought to Scranton some of the outstanding musical critics of the United States.

He was a member of and served as secretary of the Welsh Philosophical Society, and in that capacity, together with John Courier, served as one of the secretaries of the great eisteddfod at Division Street and Hyde Park Avenue in 1880. At that eisteddfod, Mrs. George Howell was the shining star as a prize winner in elocution. He helped in promoting the first Gymanfa Ganu held by the Welsh churches of Scranton.

James Reese, whose bardic title was *Athenydd*, was a writer of considerable ability and for years was the Scranton correspondent for *Y Drych*. He won many prizes for his poems and essays at eisteddfods.

James W. Reese died in 1929, at the age of 80. His earthly remains are interred in Shady Lane Cemetery, Chinchilla, PA.

Frances Davies, who became the wife of James W. Reese in 1874, was born in Rhomney, Wales. She came to America with her mother at the age of seven. Her father had preceded them here and joined them upon their arrival. The American Civil War broke out while she and her mother were en route to America. As an adult, Frances Davies recalled seeing the departure of men from Scranton for service in the Civil War.

Frances Davies, as we have noted above, was married at 6 o'clock in the morning on May 9, 1874, to James W. Reese. The marriage took place at the Davies family homestead at 141 South Fillmore Avenue in Hyde Park, which is located between Jackson and Washburn Streets. That block has been described by some as one of the epicenters of all things Welsh in Scranton during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

The back yard to the Davies homestead was almost an acre in size, and there the family maintained a team of horses to draw their carriage; also a small flock of chickens. Such livestock in urban environments were a common occurrence at the time.

Walter S. Powell, my father, recalled, in 1984, that his mother's father, James W. Reese, used to drive a horse and carriage to Gravel Pond, near Clark's Summit, to go fishing. In that same backyard, in later years, my paternal grandparents, Silas and Olivia Powell, maintained a small orchard, in which there were, among many other trees, several quince trees, as well as an extraordinary grape arbor in the form of an arcade, down the center of which ran a stone walkway; also extensive vegetable and flower gardens.

Frances Davies was the daughter of Daniel J. and Mary Davies, whose earthly remains are interred in the Washburn Street Cemetery. Daniel J. Davies was born on August 29, 1832 in Penlancych, Pembrokeshire, South Wales, and died in Scranton on January 16, 1893.

Frances Davies was, as we have noted above, was one of the organizers and a charter member of the Tabernacle Congregational Church and an active life member in the Cana White Shrine of the Jerusalem Annette chapter of the Order of the Eastern Star; the Dames of Malta, No. 35; and the Shepherds of Bethlehem.

Frances Davies Reese, one of the singers of the undefeated Cambro-American choir of the Reconstruction period, was identified with early choral singing in this section, and in 1924 was one of the few remaining singers of the famous Robert James Choir, with an undefeated reputation during its activity. Frances Davies Reese died in May 1943, at the age of 88, and her earthly remains were interred beside those of her husband, *Athenydd*, in the Shady Lane Cemetery, Chinchilla, PA.

They were extraordinary people, those Welsh ancestors of mine. How privileged I am to be one of their descendants.

S. Robert Powell